

**CAREER MATURITY, AWARENESS, AND PLANNING OF HONOURS  
PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

by

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**SUPERVISOR: Dr Kamilla Rawatlal**

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## SUMMARY

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Department: Department of Psychology

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Degree: Masters in Psychology

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Career choice has been identified as one factor influencing an individual's employability. The ability for individuals to deal with career-related challenges requires career maturity, career awareness and appropriate career planning. The challenge psychology students face is getting into their master's selection programme. This study explored the career maturity and career awareness of Honours psychology students and how their experiences have contributed to and informed their career planning in psychology. A total number of 10 participants who were currently enrolled for a Bachelor of Social Sciences Honours (Psychology) programme at the University of Pretoria were interviewed via the Zoom platform. This study employed

qualitative research, and interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilised in analysing the data. The theoretical framework of this study was founded on Donald Super's career development theory. The results and findings of this study showed what pursuing an Honours degree in psychology means for students and their careers. In addition, the results showed how academic background knowledge and lived experiences in the psychology field informed and contributed to their career planning. The research study discussed the different career choices and options identified by the participants.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Masters in Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation/thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval.

The author declares that s/he has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for Researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.



Student name: Zanele Zoleka Lecage

August 2023

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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Topic of work	Career maturity, awareness, and planning of honours psychology students: a phenomenological approach

### Declaration

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. I declare that this **Dissertation** (e.g., essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation, thesis, etc.) is my own original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed source, internet or any other source), this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements as stated in the University's plagiarism prevention policy.
3. I have not used another student's past written work to hand in as my own.
4. I have not allowed, and will not allow anyone, to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.



Signature

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Unemployment is increasing in the world and has affected the livelihoods of so many people. However, graduates from higher education institutions have been the most affected by unemployment. Various factors contribute to the rapid increase in unemployment. One of the factors is career choice and field of study. A previous study showed that half of the students will experience career-related issues in their lifetime (Mubiana, 2010). People must choose a career that will be relevant in the future and offer them the opportunity to be employed by future employers. This concept is known as employability, which will be further unpacked in the following chapter, which is the literature review. To lead a successful career, graduates would need to overcome career-related challenges and work on developing their careers. In the past, a degree has been identified as the key to entering the labour market; however, times have changed as graduate employers require individuals to possess distinctive skills beyond academic achievements. Graduates must ensure they gain relevant skills beyond their degree to become employable. The ability to work on their employability demonstrates career maturity and career planning.

Building a successful career takes the right level of training, career maturity, career planning, and career awareness. Higher education institutions offer individuals the opportunity to receive training in their fields of study. Postgraduate degrees provide students with the opportunity to have more career options available to them and can specialise in their field of study (Manathunga et al., 2012; University of Pretoria, 2019). This study will be focused on honours programmes in the field of psychology at the University of Pretoria. Honours programmes are specialised postgraduate degrees that provide students with in-depth expertise within their respective fields and prepare students for further research (Council on Higher Education, 2013). A previous study found that psychology major

undergraduates who possess a Bachelor of Art or Bachelor of Social Sciences are considered to have general skills because of the general nature of their degree; this poses a challenge for potential employers as they cannot identify the exact skills these graduates will bring into their companies (Mubiana, 2010).

As mentioned, honour programmes offer students the opportunity to be specialists in their field and provide them with more career opportunities. Thus, sufficient career awareness and maturity can help honours psychology students plan and prepare to pursue a career path within the field of psychology (Landrum, 2018). Career maturity refers to an individual's readiness to make independent and well-informed career decisions and career choices (Jawarneh, 2016). Career maturity informs and guides an individual's career planning and level of career awareness (Coertse & Schepers, 2004; Jawarneh, 2016). Career planning is discovering and establishing career objectives that are aligned with an individual's interests, abilities, and skills (Chetana & Mohapatra, 2017). Career awareness is understanding the career options and possibilities available to an individual in the long term. With an Honours degree, psychology graduates have more career options to; however, their level of career awareness is dependent on their self-knowledge and career knowledge, which is informed by their lived experiences.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study will be contextualised using Donald Super's career development theory. This theory will be discussed and unpacked in the literature review in detail. Super's career development theory is derived from the psychosocial family of theories (Long, 2012). The

psychosocial family theories propose that career development happens in a sequence of life stages where particular developmental tasks need to be accomplished (Long, 2012).

Super's Career Developmental Theory is grounded on two ideas. Firstly, he introduced the notion of self-concept, which develops and changes as the individual navigates through different stages in life (Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Super, 1980). Self-concept refers to an individual's perception of who they are, their abilities, traits, and values (Jawarneh, 2016). Secondly, career development is a continuous process that occurs over an individual's lifespan (Bakari, 2014; Hunt & Rhodes, 2021). Super perceived a career as a sequence of roles played by a person over a lifetime (Super, 1957). Thus, a person plays various roles throughout their lifetime, some of which are adopted at different stages of life (Super, 1980). Some roles proposed by Super include but are not limited to child, pensioner, student, parent, and occupational roles (Super, 1980).

Super proposed that to fulfil different roles, individuals have to undergo different life stages. With each life stage, individuals need to overcome challenges and must accomplish developmental tasks, which will result in the career satisfaction of the individual (Super, 1980). The career developmental tasks are as follows: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. The ability to accomplish and cope with each developmental task in each of the developmental tasks that these life stages demand is vocational maturity (Stead & Watson, 1998). Vocational Maturity is also known as career maturity.

### **1.3 Research Rationale**

This research study was set to explore the career maturity and career awareness of Honours psychology students and how their experiences have contributed to and informed their career planning in psychology. The study focused on Honours psychology students who were currently enrolled at the time of the research study at the University of Pretoria. The focus of Honours students was a result of Honours students having more career options available to them in comparison to undergraduate students within the same field of study.

For this study, a qualitative research methodology is the most suitable research methodology as the researcher intends to explore the career planning, career awareness, and career maturity of students studying the Honours programme in psychology. This approach taken to the study allowed the researcher to get a better understanding of the students' lived experiences about their career and their level of maturity concerning career-related matters. It is important to note that previously, quantitative studies were conducted to measure the career maturity of individuals, and limited research has been done on the subjective experience of students. This research will provide a qualitative perspective on career maturity.

### **1.4 Research questions**

In addition, the researcher will explore the extent to which Honours psychology students have explored and researched the different career options they can venture into within the field of psychology should they not get accepted into a master's programme. The study seeks to answer the following questions: What does pursuing an Honours degree in psychology mean for students and their careers? How have their academic background and lived experiences in the psychology field informed and contributed to their career planning?

## 1.5 Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: The background of this study was provided in this chapter. The theoretical framework that was contextualized was introduced. In addition, the research rationale and research questions of the study were provided in this chapter

Chapter 2: The literature that forms the foundation of this study will be explored. The key terms of this study will be unpacked and discussed concerning Honours psychology students.

Chapter 3: The research procedure and methodology are discussed. The data collected and data analysis process will be explored, as well as the quality control method. Lastly, the ethical considerations adopted will be examined.

Chapter 4: The results and the findings of the research will be reviewed and reported. The themes will be introduced by using extract and direct quotations from the interviews that were transcribed.

Chapter 5: This is the discussion section that will focus on interconnecting the aims and research questions with the findings and themes of the research study. The researcher will discuss how these findings support previous studies.

Chapter 6: This chapter will conclude the study. In addition, the limitations and recommendations for further studies will be discussed

# **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**



## **2.1 Introduction**

Career development and awareness among postgraduate students are imperative to ensure that they secure employment. However, with the increasing number of graduates, entering the labour market poses a challenge for these students as they need to be innovative and work on obtaining skills that will work to their advantage. The purpose of the literature review is to provide background information and contextualise this study. Career maturity, career awareness and career planning are part of the essential factors in becoming employable and for career success. University is a pivotal time for students as they are within their exploration stage of career development, which is a defining stage of their self-concept and an opportunity for career exploration. This literature review will analyse existing research and findings in relation to this study.

## **2.2 Higher Education and Graduate Employment**

Graduate unemployment has become a rapidly increasing issue not only in South Africa but worldwide. Career choice has been identified as one of the factors that influence the graduate's chances of employability (Dunga, 2016; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016). It is, therefore, important that when students decide to pursue a specific career path, they understand and gather sufficient information on the relevance of their degree within the labour market (Tulu, 2017). University students are at the developmental stage known as emerging adulthood, and career exploration occurs predominantly during this stage (Grosemans et al., 2020). In choosing a career path, students need to ensure that they have enough career and self-knowledge, which will help them in the long run with their career choices and decision-making (Abdullah et al., 2018). Research has shown that 50% of university students will experience career-related issues (Mubiana, 2010).

### **2.2.1 Higher Education and post-graduate studies**

According to Mzwanga (2019), higher education refers to educational institutions which offer and award advanced qualifications, such as diplomas or degrees in a specific field or discipline (p. 2). Higher education is essential on a personal and social level. It provides an opportunity for economic development and growth by imparting knowledge and skills to individuals (Tomlinson, 2008). On the other hand, higher education provides individuals with the opportunity to enter the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Therefore, higher education institutions (universities, etc.) serve as agents of generating new knowledge and training for the world of work (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2014).

Historically, under apartheid, higher education was racially separated, and white people had access to favourable conditions and resourced institutions compared to black people (Chisholm, 2012; Mzangwa, 2019). Although access to quality higher education can improve the standard of living for an individual, the lack thereof can serve as a barrier to an improved life (Mzangwa, 2019). Even though higher education systems may serve as agents to lift the standard of communities and develop nations, they can also contribute to the degeneration of society (Mzangwa, 2019). In the times of apartheid, the black majority had limited access to quality education, which resulted in them having limited access economically and a lower standard of living (Schoole & Adeyemo, 2016).

However, post-apartheid called for a new dawn for South Africa in offering an inclusive culture for higher education where race did not serve as a determinant of access to education (Chisholm, 2012). The new South Africa intended and still intends to redress the inequities of the past to provide everyone with equal opportunities to pursue higher education qualifications (Schoole & Adeyemo, 2016). Educational access was an indicator of social progression. There has been some growth in the South African higher education system post-

apartheid due to the inclusive environment (Mzangwa, 2019). The advancement in the higher education system has been guided by policies (Schoole & Adeyemo, 2016). This means that there is equal opportunity for everyone in the labour market.

Many students pursue a university degree with the hopes of gaining access to the labour market and improving their career trajectories (Archer & Chetty, 2013). Universities play an essential role in providing students that will make them employable in the ever-emerging labour market (McCune et al., 2010). In addition, universities offer training to students so that they may be total participants in the global economy (Chan, 2016). While pursuing a university degree, students must be aware of their chosen field of study and if it will be relevant to the future workforce (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). Research has found that undergraduate students who majored in engineering and commerce subjects are most likely to secure employment at a quicker rate compared to their peers within the humanities faculty (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016; Rajecki & Borden, 2011). This study demonstrates the importance of making the right career choice, which will promote employability.

An undergraduate degree is no longer a way people can set themselves apart as there is an increase in the number of graduates with undergraduate degrees, and this calls for individuals to further their studies (Hoffman & Julie, 2012; Tomlinson, 2008). Today, the educational level has become one of the determinants of the position people hold within society (Incikabi et al., 2013). Thus, more and more students are pursuing their postgraduate degrees to set themselves apart in the job market for their future employers and have a sense of achievement on a personal level (Hurst & Carson, 2021; Incikabi et al., 2013). However, there are various motivations why students pursue university degrees beyond the previously mentioned; these reasons are both internal and external (Hurst & Carson, 2021).

In this research study, the focus is on the internal and external career-related motivations for pursuing a university degree. Furthermore, this study will delve into the pursuit of a type of postgraduate degree, i.e., an honours degree. According to the Council on Higher Education (2013), honours programmes are specialised postgraduate degrees that provide students with in-depth expertise within their respective fields and prepare students for further research. Furthermore, honours programmes create an environment where students can engage in higher-order and analytical thinking within their specific field of study (Jansen & Suhre, 2015). In a study conducted on the reason Bachelor of Commerce students pursue an honours programme, the researchers found students pursue an honours programme for the following reasons: eligibility to a master's programme, to increase their career options and to conduct future research within their field (Ferreira & Van Antwerpen, 2016). Another study found that the motivation behind students pursuing graduate education (postgraduate degrees) was to satisfy their personal and social needs (Incikabi et al., 2013).

One of the most prominent disciplines when it comes to post-graduate studies in South Africa is psychology (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Psychology is one of the most popular and rapidly growing fields (Yu et al., 2020). To make career strides within the field of psychology and have a successful career, individuals need to study beyond the undergraduate degree. Psychology major undergraduates who possess a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Social Sciences are considered to have general skills because of the general nature of their degree; this poses a challenge for potential employers as they cannot identify the exact skills these graduates will bring into their companies (Mubiana, 2010). However, by pursuing a postgraduate degree, students have more career options available to them and can specialise in their field of study (Manathunga et al., 2012; University of Pretoria, 2019).

Subsequently, the Department of Psychology under and postgraduate programmes booklet from the University of Pretoria recommends the different career paths that Honours students can pursue once they obtain their degree (University of Pretoria, 2019). The career paths include working in the following industries: “community and social development, health and welfare assistance, education social research, human resources and employee wellness, services for the disabled and the ageing, government, non-governmental and non-profit organizations” (University of Pretoria, 2019, p. 7). In addition, students may also register as psychometrics or counsellors, considering that they complete the requirements provided by the HPCSA (Landrum, 2018). The advantages and opportunities that come with an Honours degree in psychology show how broad the field is and offer hope to those students who might not make it into a master’s programme that will lead to registration as a psychologist.

### **2.2.2 Graduate employment and employability**

Unemployment is a global crisis and has negatively affected the world’s economies. Recent studies have shown that unemployment has negative implications for an individual’s psychological well-being (Achdut & Rafaeli, 2020; Mago, 2018; Van Lill & Bakker, 2020). Over the years, researchers have argued that obtaining a university degree is the key to securing better employment opportunities and pursuing post-graduate studies in future (Eunice et al., 2018; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016; Mutambara et al., 2018; Rajecki & Borden, 2011). Irrespective of these findings, the youth is the most vulnerable when it comes to unemployment (Eunice et al., 2018; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2021).

Unemployment is a risk factor among many other challenges that young people might face during the emerging adulthood stage of their lives (Graham et al., 2019; McGee & Thompson, 2015). Emerging adulthood refers to a stage in an individual's life where they go through an identity exploration stage in their areas of work, relationships and worldviews (Van Lill & Bakker, 2020). Emerging adulthood is a vital developmental stage as individuals get skills and training to prepare for the work they will take on in adulthood (Wood et al., 2018).

Although obtaining a degree may allow an individual to be in an advantageous position compared to those who have not received any form of higher education, employers are now looking for skills beyond an academic qualification (Tomlinson, 2008). In our modern world, a degree alone is no longer a ticket to entering the job market; various factors come into play when it comes to determining a graduate's employability and workforce readiness (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020).

There has been a significant change in the recruitment of graduates. Beyond academic training and knowledge, employers are now looking at graduates' personal abilities and skills (Tomlinson, 2008). A graduate recruitment study showed that 60% of respondents who are graduate employers believed that poor-quality graduates were those with limited transferable skills and no real experience in the world of work (Branine, 2008). Thus, employability is much more than obtaining a qualification and securing a job; it is now concerned with graduates' ability to transfer and apply their acquired knowledge and skills in the world of work (Garwe, 2020). Employability is vital to the advancement of graduates' careers (Garwe, 2020).

The shift in graduate recruitment poses a career challenge and calls for graduates to take a different approach when it comes to their careers. Graduates will need to put in effort to acquire skills behind their qualifications to overcome the competition within the labour market (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). The ability to overcome career-related challenges requires individuals to have a level of maturity. Career maturity, awareness, and planning play an essential role in the journey of becoming employable. A low level of career maturity and lack of career planning and awareness may result in unemployment or underemployment at a later stage in the individual's life (Jansen van Rensburg & Goede, 2020; Ndebele & Ndlovu, 2019). However, successful careers do not happen overnight, and it is a continuous process that requires dedication and effort.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that was utilised in this study is Super's Career Development Theory, which falls under the psychosocial family of theories of student development. Super's career development theory has been one of the prominent theories utilised to conceptualise career development.

### **2.3.1 Super's Career Development Theory**

Super's career development theory is a psychosocial theory of student development. Psychosocial theories are founded on the notion that people grow and develop throughout their lives (Long, 2012). Psychosocial theories consider development as a chronological process wherein specific developmental tasks need to be accomplished across different stages of life (Long, 2012). In essence, career development is a journey that progresses and evolves over the individual's life span (Hunt & Rhodes, 2021). Super's Career Developmental Theory is grounded on two ideas. Firstly, he introduced the notion of self-concept, which

develops and changes as the individual navigates through different stages of life (Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Super, 1980). Secondly, career development is a continuous process that occurs in an individual over a lifespan (Bakari, 2014; Hunt & Rhodes, 2021). These two ideas will be examined in detail in the following sections.

### **2.3.1.1 Super's notion of self-concept**

The notion of self-concept is fundamental to Super's career developmental theory. Self-concept refers to an individual's perception of who they are, their abilities, traits, and values (Jawarneh, 2016). In other words, self-concept is how individuals see themselves (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). Super argued that an individual's self-concept changes as they develop, mature and reach the different career developmental stages (Hunt & Rhodes, 2021; Super, 1980). He proposed that self-concept changes due to the environments individuals find themselves in and is initially shaped by childhood interactions and experiences (Bakari, 2014; Hunt & Rhodes, 2021).

Career choice, according to Super, is a reflection of an individual's self-concept. In addition, Super's theory proposes that an individual will choose an occupation that is aligned with their self-concept (Super, 1980; Wallace-Broschious et al., 1994). Following this notion, an individual's career identity is a realistic representation of how they see themselves (Bakari, 2014). As such, career satisfaction for individuals is a result of taking on roles where their self-concept is successfully implemented (Bakari, 2014).

### **2.3.1.2 Super's life span and career developmental stages**

Super perceived a career as a sequence of roles played by a person over a lifetime (Super, 1957). Thus, a person plays various roles throughout their lifetime, some of which are



adopted at different stages of life (Super, 1980). Some roles proposed by Super include but are not limited to child, pensioner, student, parent, and occupational roles (Super, 1980). Super proposed that to fulfil the roles individuals go through career developmental stages. These stages are growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Each of these stages comprises developmental tasks which individuals must fulfil to experience career satisfaction (Super, 1980).

The growth stage is the initial stage for individuals and is usually between birth and 14 years (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). A large part of this developmental stage encompasses an individual's childhood. In this stage, an individual's self-concept begins to develop through interactions and identifying with their significant others within their environment, such as family, school, and neighbourhood (Bakari, 2014). Individuals are socialised into the world, where they build traits that will help them better understand the world and the world of work (Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Long, 2012). This

The exploration stage of Super's career development theory occurs during adolescence till early adulthood (15 – 24 years) of individuals (Long, 2012). During this developmental stage, individuals will explore different career options and choices by interacting and engaging with their environment through classes, leisure activities, part-time work and hobbies (Bakari, 2014; Long, 2012). In addition, exploring different options and preferences available to individuals will narrow down careers based on their interests (Hunt & Rhodes, 2021). The ability of individuals to narrow down their choices and options mirrors the development of their self-concept (Bakari, 2014). In essence, during this stage, individuals learn about themselves and gather more accurate information about the world of work (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). This stage correlates with university students

as they develop career interests, gather career information, and begin to align the skill set and training required for specific roles (Long, 2012).

The exploration presents three sub-stages, namely, crystallisation, specification and implementation (Bakari, 2014; Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Firstly, the crystallisation stage is characterised by individuals undergoing a process of narrowing down their career choices based on their interests and what they would enjoy (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). During the specification sub-stage, individuals would choose their preferred job (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Lastly, implementation is when the individual begins taking action towards getting started in the selected field by either training or pursuing a qualification (Bakari, 2014; Kosine & Lewis, 2008). To master the exploratory stage, Super argues that career information about the world of work, career decision-making skills, career planning skills, and appropriate use of information resources (Long, 2012).

The third stage of Super's career developmental stages is known as the establishment. The establishment is concerned with gaining entry-level skills, the acquisition of additional career knowledge and creating stability in their career (Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Long, 2012). in this career developmental stage, the individual will seek career advancement or promotion by increasing their job responsibilities (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). The establishment stage is followed by the maintenance stage, which is characterised by the individual's need to maintain their career positions, while some may look into changing employers (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). Lastly, the disengagement stage is focused on planning towards retirement and leaving the world of work (Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006). Super acknowledged that these developmental stages are not fixed,

and individuals may re-cycle through the process of these stages at a later stage in life as a result of labour market trends or career changes (Long, 2012).

## **2.4 Career Maturity**

Career maturity is a concept derived initially from Super's career development theory. Super saw career maturity as a concept that unfolds in each developmental stage (Super, 1980). Super defined career maturity as "the readiness to make appropriate choices when engaged in the planned exploration and possessing appropriate occupational knowledge, self-knowledge and decision-making knowledge" (Super, 1957, as cited in Ismail et al., 2018). Career maturity is the ability to develop behaviours and make decisions that are informed by self-knowledge and career knowledge to achieve the set career goals (Coertse & Schepers, 2004; Lestari & Tentama, 2020). Concurrently, career maturity refers to an individual's readiness to make independent and well-informed career decisions and career choices (Jawarneh, 2016). Career maturity demonstrates an individual's ability to deal and cope with developmental tasks compared to their peers within the same stage (Stead & Watson, 1998).

Career maturity involves affective and cognitive skills, which are deemed necessary in helping individuals make realistic and well-informed career decisions (Mubiana, 2010). The dimensions of career maturity are career planning, career decision-making and career exploration, information regarding the chosen occupation and realisation (this encompasses self-knowledge) (Buys, 2014; Lestari & Tentama, 2020; Mubiana, 2010). Career planning and career exploration are also considered affective skills, while career making and career information are cognitive skills of career maturity (Janeiro, 2010). Individuals will be deemed career mature once they have employed the dimensions of career maturity in accomplishing and coping with developmental tasks and challenges. Consequently, Super

acknowledged that the dimensions of career maturity are more fitting for individuals during their exploration developmental stage (Super, 1980). Career maturity informs and guides an individual's career planning and level of career awareness (Coertse & Schepers, 2004; Jawarneh, 2016).

## **2.5 Career planning**

Career planning and preparation are essential, as they will help guide students and individuals in the direction they should follow to achieve their career goals. Career planning is a process in which individuals identify their career goals and the steps that need to be taken to achieve these goals (Chetana & Mohapatra, 2017; Gunkel et al., 2010). Career planning is also a decision-making process wherein individuals can match their skills, interests, abilities, and aspirations to the vocation that they believe is the most aligned with them (Chetana & Mohapatra, 2017; Serbes & Albay, 2017). Career planning is discovering and establishing career objectives that are aligned with an individual's interests, abilities, and skills (Chetana & Mohapatra, 2017).

It is essential that, in the process of career planning, individuals are self-knowledgeable and self-aware. Self-knowledge refers to “insight into one’s personality which enables him to know what he is capable of” (Mubiana, 2010, p. 13). The notion of self-knowledge can be linked to Super’s notion of self-concept. Self-knowledge and career knowledge work hand in hand in the journey of career planning. Career knowledge refers to the knowledge that one has about the career options or career alternatives that are available to them (Mubiana, 2010). However, career planning is not as simple as it seems above. Students will need to adopt strategies and steps that will help them move in the desired direction. According to Chetana & Mohapatra (2017, p. 615), the “basic steps of career planning are Self-assessment;

Investigating and researching career opportunities; Goal setting; Action Planning and Evaluation”. With that said, career planning is not just a one-time activity, but it is a continuous process that requires an individual to constantly engage in the basic steps of career planning (Anwar et al., 2021). The purpose of career planning is to assist individuals in taking ownership of their future careers by establishing action steps that will advance them to the desired level (Anwar et al., 2021).

## **2.6 Career Awareness**

Career awareness is understanding the career options and possibilities available to an individual in the long term (Esterhuyse et al., 2019). Career awareness is focused on career exploration (Keumala et al., 2018). Career awareness involves having information on career opportunities, educational & skills requirements, the job market, work expectations and industry knowledge (Ruggunan & Kanengoni, 2017).

Career awareness among students varies according to their different family backgrounds and areas from which they come (Tian & Chen, 2018). A research study found that socioeconomic factor is a determining factor in career information and university access (Mzangwa, 2019). However, career awareness develops through university years as individuals engage in peer interactions and career counselling-related activities influence them, and there are resources within higher education institutions that inform their careers (Tian & Chen, 2018). Therefore, university experience can help students from disadvantaged backgrounds gain more knowledge and awareness regarding their careers and fields of interest.

In a study conducted by Tian & Chen (2018), they found that first-year students who come from rural areas have little career awareness or career-related skills compared to their peers who come from urban areas. In another study that was conducted in Japan, most of the students presented that they had a low level of career awareness at the beginning of their degrees, and most of them had selected their courses based on what was convenient at the time (Ishkawa et al., 2009). Career awareness before university is generally gained through interacting in career-related conversations with peers and teacher-learner relationships (Tian & Chen, 2018). Further, universities or higher education institutions offer career counselling services, career fairs, and even training for some fields of study (Acai, 2014; Brewer, 2009). Career services programs and counselling are essential in increasing the level of awareness for individuals when it comes to their careers (Anwar et al., 2021). This allows the individuals to make informed career decisions and offers them the platform to explore their careers and themselves (Anwar et al., 2021). In addition, technology (mobile applications, social media and webpages) have become prominent tools for gaining career information, thus increasing awareness (Anwar et al., 2021; Sampson et al., 2018).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

For graduates to go into a professional-level job upon completing their degree, they must be proactive as an undergraduate and engage in several career-planning activities. Sufficient career awareness and maturity can help honours psychology students plan and prepare to pursue a different career path within the field of psychology (Landrum, 2018). Limited information and research are conducted on the subjective experiences of Honours psychology students concerning their career maturity, career awareness and career options. This study explored the extent to which Honours psychology students have explored and researched the different career options they can venture into within the field of psychology should they not

get accepted into a master's programme. The findings of this study may help future researchers better understand the students' lived experiences about their careers and their level of maturity concerning career-related matters in psychology.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



### **3.1 Introduction**

For this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted to identify and explore the career maturity and career awareness experiences of Honours psychology students and how their experiences have contributed to and informed their career planning within the field of psychology. Qualitative research studies are commonly used in research studies when one is interested in understanding a particular social phenomenon or how people interact and experience the world (Tolley et al., 2016). More often than not, qualitative research studies tend to focus on individuals' subjectivity (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

One of the most common ways to collect information in qualitative research is through a semi-structured interview, which allows the researcher to ask predetermined open-ended questions about the explored area (Gill et al., 2008). Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, the researcher or the participants can delve deeper into the participants' experiences, thoughts or feelings (Mahat-Shamir et al., 2021). Furthermore, in this research, a hermeneutic phenomenology research approach was adopted, which is presented as one of the approaches under qualitative research design. The hermeneutic phenomenology research approach will be elaborated on in the following section.

### **3.2 Research Approach: Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research focuses on the meanings of lived experiences from individuals' or groups' subjective points of view (Fuster Gullien, 2019; Lauterbach, 2018). Phenomenology tries to illustrate the nature of things while trying to make sense of the complex nature of lived experiences (Fuster Gullien, 2019). Historically, there have been two types of phenomenology: descriptive and hermeneutic. Descriptive was developed by Edmund Husserl (Fuster Gullien, 2019; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). "Husserl's phenomenology

was about the relation between consciousness and ‘objects of knowledge’ with an emphasis on the objects – ‘the things themselves’ “(Sloan & Bowe, 2014, pp. 5). On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenology was developed by Martin Heidegger, which followed Husserl’s descriptive approach (Kafle, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology will be unpacked in detail in the following paragraph, as it was the focal point of this research study.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher seeks to understand and explore individuals’ subjective lived experiences with a particular phenomenon while allowing for an interpretative aspect that is based on the researcher’s personal experience and knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Cherry, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Neubauer et al., 2019). Language and text are perceived as the source of all understanding with this approach (Kafle, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology is commonly concerned with collecting a rich data set through interviewing that will give you an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Cherry, 2015; Lavery, 2003). This approach focuses on looking for themes by interpreting data (Lauterbach, 2018; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The hermeneutic phenomenology research approach calls for the researcher to be reflexive. Reflexivity refers to the process in which the researcher of a study is aware and is continually reflective about their positionality, i.e., methods, questions, and subject experience, which may impact or influence how the study results are reported (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Reflexivity is useful in hermeneutic research studies as it allows the researcher to reflect on prior experience concerning the phenomenon under study when analysing the data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

The researcher adopted the hermeneutic phenomenology research approach, which allowed for the exploration and offered an in-depth understanding of the career maturity,

career awareness and career planning experiences of psychology honours students. The research did not only describe the data and outcomes of the study but interpreted the meanings ascribed. Furthermore, the researcher assumed positionality through reflexive analysis.

### **3.3 Sampling**

To ensure the study's aims were achieved, the researcher employed a non-probability purposive sampling method to recruit the participants. Non-probability purposive sampling is concerned with intentionally aiming at sampling a specific population to achieve the purpose of the study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In addition, with purposive sampling, the researcher can focus on the sample that is of interest in the study, which allows for the aim to be achieved (Andrade, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016). Although the researcher recruited 11 participants, only the data of 10 participants were reported in the results section of this study. The initial participant was used as a pilot to collect preliminary data. The ten sampled participants were current students who had enrolled for a Bachelor of Social Sciences Honours (Psychology) programme at the University of Pretoria at the time of the research.

To ensure that the participants were a true reflection of the proposed group, the researcher used a screening survey (see Appendix A) to ensure that the participants fit the study's inclusion criteria. The participants were recruited electronically, and the researcher created a digital poster, which this study's Supervisor sent to the Honours students' class representative. The class representative then distributed the poster to the students on the Honours Psychology module WhatsApp group. Interested students were then requested to contact the researcher. Once the students contacted the researcher, they were forwarded an information sheet and a short screening survey. Those shortlisted based on the survey were

then contacted and provided with the consent form and interview dates. Participants were selected based on the first 11 that responded first.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

The data of this research study was collected via semi-structured interviews. The researcher had prepared questions (Refer to Appendix B) before the interviews, which served as guidelines to ensure that the critical research questions of the study were addressed (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The questions that the researcher prepared were directed at exploring the career maturity and career awareness experiences of Honours psychology students and how their experiences have contributed to and informed their career planning within the field of psychology. The research used Zoom to collect information, and each interview session was recorded. Consent to record the interview was obtained before the interview took place.

A maximum of 45 minutes was allocated for each interview; however, most interviews took less than 45 minutes to complete. Where required, participants were more than happy to extend the time. The majority of the interviews were audio recorded; thus, it was difficult to read the body language of some of the participants when they answered questions. The researcher took some notes during the interviews based on the observations and critical statements made. Once the research was completed, the participants were sent a debriefing email with the career services contact details from the University of Pretoria in case they needed further career guidance after the interviews.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

To ensure that the research questions were addressed and explored in the greatest depth possible, the researcher used the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). First, IPA

allows an in-depth analytical approach to each interview and will enable the researcher to map out any patterns or recurring themes across each of the participants' experiences with their careers (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Second, IPA is predominantly used where there is a small sample size and in-depth structured interviews. For this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with a sample size of 10 participants. Lastly, this analytic method is informed by hermeneutics; IPA is embedded in hermeneutic phenomenology to enable the researcher's engagement in meaning-making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The researcher adopted a hermeneutics approach when engaging with the collected data, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences concerning their career while studying towards an Honours degree. This will be further unpacked in this dissertation's results and discussion session.

The researcher followed the sequence of IPA when analysing the data collected from the participants of this study. Firstly, in each case, the researcher listened to the recorded audio of the interviews and transcribed each interview shortly after each interview had taken place. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions by reading through them while listening to the audio recording again to ensure that the interviews were transcribed correctly. Secondly, the researcher reviewed each interview separately to identify the themes and findings within each interview. Lastly, once the second step was completed for each interview, the researcher clustered the identified themes and mapped out the patterns that emerged from the research. The themes of this study are summarised in Table 2 of Chapter 4 of this study.

### **3.6 Quality Control**

To ensure quality control and address potential bias, the researcher explored her positionality through reflexive analysis. Positionality refers to the ability of a researcher to acknowledge that they are a part of the social world under study and that this world has already been interpreted by existing social actors (Corlett & Mavin, 2019; Rawatlal, 2021). Throughout this study, the researcher reflected on her relationship with the research participants, data and the research outcome (Corlett & Mavin, 2019). To further enhance the quality of the study, the researcher will adopt the process of data triangulation for credibility (Santos et al., 2020). An audio recording device and transcription were also used to enhance the data management process (Tessier, 2012).

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are essential to ensure that participants are protected from any harm (Arfin, 2018; Ketefian, 2014). Informed consent and a participant information sheet were provided to the participants before the interviews took place; this provided the participants with all the information they needed to know regarding the details and procedure of the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017; Ketefian, 2014). The informed consent form stipulates that participating in the study is voluntary, and the participants could withdraw at any point (Arfin, 2018). During the interview, the researcher asked the participants if they were comfortable continuing the study and reminded them they were more than welcome to withdraw at any point.

Since the study was conducted online via Zoom, the researcher was the host of the meeting, and the participants were each provided with a meeting ID and passcode that had the code name that was assigned to them, respectively. The researcher ensured that only the

participant was admitted into the meeting. This process was followed to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants were maintained (Archibald et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020).

For analysis and reporting purposes, assigned code names and demographic information (gender and age) are used. The participants were given a participant code name once they had signed the informed consent form and sent it back to the researcher. This ensured anonymity and confidentiality (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017). Once the interviews were completed, the researcher ensured that the participants were sent the Student Counselling Unit (SCU) contact details in case sensitive issues arose during the study. Last, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed the participants to provide insight into their career maturity and career awareness and how their experiences have contributed to and informed their career planning in psychology. By using semi-structured interviews, the research was able to address the key research questions and guide the direction of the interview. Purposive sampling allowed for the target population that is in the interest of this research study to be recruited. Ethical approval for this study was obtained, and their anonymity was maintained by providing them with participant code names.

# CHAPTER 4: RESULTS



## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of the participant's demographic description (gender, race and age group) using their code names. All the participants were enrolled for an Honours degree in psychology at the time when the data was collected. In addition, the results and findings of the study will be provided under the respective themes.

## 4.2 Participant description

*Table 1: Participant demographics information*

PAR001	White Female who is between the of age 25 – 34
PAR002	White male between the age of 18 – 24
PAR003	White male between the age of 35 – 44
PAR004	White female between the age of 18 – 24
PAR005	White female between the age of 18 – 24
PAR006	African female between the age of 18 – 24
PAR007	Indian female between the age of 18 – 24
PAR008	African female between the age of 18 – 24
PAR009	White female between the age of 25 – 34
PAR010	Indian male between the age of 18 – 24

### 4.3 Key Findings and Emerging Themes

The following section will look at the emerging themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data of the research study. Verbatim quotations presented in the sub-themes will be provided with the participants' code names who made the statement. The participants' code names (i.e. Par001, Par002) were allocated to the participants by the researcher according to the sequence of interviews that took place.

*Table 2: Summary of the themes and sub-themes developed from the data analysis process*

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description of findings in relation to the theme
Career Awareness	The Initial Introduction to Psychology	This theme covers a time in the participants' lives when they were first introduced to the field of psychology.
	Career awareness resources	The participants used various resources to develop career awareness. Google and the internet have been the main resources for all the participants
	Barriers to career awareness development	Two of the participants mentioned that limited access to university can serve as a career information barrier. Two more

		<p>participants mentioned that it was at university that they started developing their career awareness and knowledge</p>
	<p>Effects of career awareness development</p>	<p>The researcher found that in gaining career knowledge and awareness, three of the participants benefitted not just from a career perspective but from a psychological and personal perspective, too</p>
<p>Career Maturity</p>	<p>Career knowledge</p>	<p>Four of the participants disclosed that they had limited knowledge about the field of psychology, while another participant disclosed that they had been intentional about expanding their career knowledge. Moreover, one participant expressed that due to previous knowledge and exposure to the world of work, a job role can be created out of nothing</p>
	<p>Career exploration</p>	<p>Nine out of 10 of the participants</p>

		had explored the career options or streams that they could potentially venture into with an Honours degree in psychology
	Self-knowledge	Half of the participants shared the perceptions they have of themselves as well as their self-awareness as a result of studying psychology
	Linking self-knowledge and career-knowledge	This sub-theme covers how nine out of the 10 participants align who they are, their interests and skills to the career options that they have explored
	Career Decisions: The Honours experience	Six out of 10 participants made career decisions and career plan adjustments based on the circumstances and the realities regarding the competitiveness of masters they became aware of during their Honours year
	Career Planning and Moving Ahead	Five participants disclosed the interim career plans and strategies

		that they need to adopt in order to place themselves in an advantageous position
Significance of Honours degree	Personal meaning of an honours degree	Five of the participants shared what obtaining an honours degree in psychology would personally mean to them - for most of these participants perceived an honours degree as a sense of achievement and accomplishment
	Career Importance of an honours degree	Three out of 10 participants shared that obtaining an Honours degree is a way to gain more knowledge in the field of psychology. Four participants shared that an Honours degree means better chances of employability and differentiation in the job market. Two participants shared that honours is a stepping stone to them reaching their career goals of becoming psychologists.

	Understanding the Value of an Honours Degree in South Africa	Three of the participants had limited or no knowledge of the value of an honours degree in South Africa. Two participants believed that an Honours degree imparts skills that would work to one's advantage when seeking employment, while Two other participants expressed that one can work with communities in society
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#### 4.3.1 The Development of career awareness in Honours psychology students

The development of career awareness is an essential theme as it reflects the level and extent to which Honours psychology students are aware of the career options and possibilities available to them in the long run. The researcher will be discussing participants' initial introduction to the field of psychology or when they first heard of the concept of psychology. In addition, this section will cover the different resources that the participants utilised by the participants throughout their university careers to explore and gain more information about the field of psychology and the options available to them with their postgraduate degree.

##### 4.3.1.1 Initial Introduction to the Field of Psychology

Two of the participants were introduced into the field of psychology due to mental health challenges they had experienced during their life. It appeared that one of the

participants was struggling with depression and eventually sought professional advice where she was then referred to a facility:

*PAR001: "She [her doctor] then referred me to an outpatient facility. She booked me for two weeks in Bloemfontein, that was my first encounter with psychology in itself. In a different case, the participant researched due to the mental health struggles he experienced as a teenager:*

*PAR002: "Struggles mentally as a teenager ... leads you to kind of having like this desire to gain more and more knowledge about it."*

The participants also said by seeking career guidance from a career counsellor. Some of the participants were provided with an opportunity by the career counsellor to do a vocational assessment. Through this experience, the respective career counsellors were able to assess the participants' best career choices based on their abilities, skills, interests and personalities. The following extracts demonstrate this point:

*PAR003: "So I met with psychologists and counsellors. I got to experience sort of the therapeutic encounter".*

*PAR004: "I went in grade 9 to a career guidance counsellor, and I have been going to the same one since".*

*PAR006: "I think in high school, I had aptitude tests and some of these psychometric assessments."*

*PAR007: "So my mom and dad took me to a career counsellor, where I did the tests and stuff ... she also said that play therapy. So that was the first time I heard about it. She said that you would be an amazing play therapist. Then I started looking into play therapy and stuff."*

*PAR008: "I did take an aptitude test in high school".*

One of the participants mentioned that they were initially exposed to the field of psychology by a family member who was already working as a psychologist

*PAR009: "My aunt actually did her masters in educational psychology ... So I kind of knew from that as well, more or less what a psychologist is".*

Lastly, one of the participants got into the field of psychology due to their curiosity about one of the most prominent debates within the field of psychology

*PAR010: "I was curious about things like nature vs. nurture, all those fun things that get you into psychology. And that was where it started."*

#### *4.3.1.2 Resources utilised to further develop the level of awareness.*

The participants seem to have used various resources and tools further to develop their career awareness of the field of psychology. More often than not, the participants did make use of more or less the same tools. Several of the participants further developed this awareness during their university careers. The most common tool that was used by the



participants was the internet, various webpages dedicated to the field of psychology and social media platforms. They shared that

*PAR001: "Googling... Cognition & Co, the SACAP website"*

*PAR002: "Whats app group for the psychology honours students."*

*PAR004: "I have also used google. I also like to go on Career Jet to see if they are actually asking for these jobs...I use Cognition and Co... I also used LinkedIn."*

*PAR005: "LinkedIn.. mostly it was like googling. As well as Cognition and Co."*

*PAR006: "Mainly Cognition and Co./So most of my resources I got them from social media, which is Instagram./ I watched a lot of YouTube videos,"*

*PAR007: "...mainly it's the internet and Google... and YouTube. I watched some TED talks from a clinical psychologist."*

*PAR008: "I would just google all the time and use blogs or like sites dedicated to psychology, for example, Cognition and Co."*

*PAR009: " I am a big googler... Uhm, Cognition and Co. A lot of pages on Facebook."*

*PAR010: " ...well she has helped me with my LinkedIn profile, Indeed profile, and my general curriculum vitae (CV). She helped me understand the inner workings of websites how to efficiently produce CV and a profile that will be optimal to get jobs; that's the third one. The fourth one is Cognition and Co."*

The participants consulted with professionals and mentors within their university borders as well as those practising in the field. The participants were able to get first-hand experience and information regarding the possibilities within the field of psychology. These extracts demonstrate that:

*PAR001: "...student faculty advisor .."*

*PAR003: "I have spoken to quite a few people. A few psychologists within the industry, I have consulted with a few of the lecturers at Tuks ..."*

*PAR005: " One time, I spoke to another psychologist who also just gave me like some advice."*

*PAR006: "In the beginning of my process of applying for Honours, I made sure that I followed more people that work within the field of psychology."*

*PAR007: " ..the university does the mentorship programme, uhm, and I applied for that in the first semester, and I got a wonderful mentor. My supervisor this year has been absolutely amazing as well... she's really helped me understand how neuropsychology as a career has to progress."*

*PAR010: "The second resource were lecturers at UP."*

In other instances found that their peers and personal networks worked to their advantage in developing career awareness about psychology. The participants stated:

*PAR001: "Networking with people ... "*

*PAR005: I spoke to other students as well.."*

*PAR006: "I also joined the group chat as well where everybody got to share the different ways in which you can go into the field of psychology."*

*PAR008: "And I also relied on my friend."*

*PAR009: "My aunt actually did her masters in educational psychology ... So I kind of knew from that as well, more or less what a psychologist is."*

*PAR010: "There's actually a good friend of mine that has helped throughout this year".*

#### *4.3.1.3 Barriers to career awareness development*

The participants explained some of the challenges and difficulties that they faced regarding developing their career awareness and access to career information. One participant

mentioned that only students that are enrolled at the university can have access to information about a specific career

*PAR002: "People outside of the university taking a gap year who are doing whatever will definitely have a deficit./ is a big issue is that you have kind of like privilege access to information from being in the university alone./ This information session isn't available to anyone outside of the university."*

*PAR009: "...people don't always have access to all the information."*

Other participants admitted that it is only at the university level that they started developing their career awareness. The following excerpts present this:

*PAR008: "In undergrad, I didn't really have an idea of what else I could do after this.... when I got into Honours, it became real. And then that's when I started doing like a little bit of research of what else I can do."*

*PAR009: "...at university...I started to research how long it takes and look at the different options at the different universities. I think in university, I got most of my exposure."*

#### 4.3.1.4 Result of developing career awareness

The participants shared how gaining more information about the field of psychology has benefited them personally and psychologically. The following extracts demonstrate this point:

*PAR005: "I am not actually sure if it actually did, like planning – careerwise. It may be assisted in my personal life, not be as anxious, and it's not the end of the world. Speaking to like other students, they all experience the same sense of rejection."*

*PAR006: "... the whole career awareness thing is honestly a new thing to me. It's something that I have developed out of anxiety. It helped me to make more informed decisions...I felt that it helped me, is that it reduced my anxiety one. Two, it brought a sense of stability a sense of control./the main thing that it did it was just help me be confident in the decision that I made."*

*PAR009: "Searching on the internet and all those other resources helped, but the really thing I think really helped me was obviously not just of emotional reasons or personal reasons. But professionally as well."*

### **4.3.2 Career maturity**

This theme entails covering findings made on career knowledge, self-knowledge, career decision-making factors, career planning and career exploration of the Honours psychology students. This section will report on what the participants know about their careers, themselves and how they have used this information to make career decisions and plan for their careers within the field of psychology.

#### *4.3.2.1 Career knowledge*

Some of the participants of this study disclosed that they had limited knowledge on what they can do with their Honours degree, and they did not research their careers in depth.

They shared that:

*PAR005: "I never knew about the equivalent to BA Honours, so I think if I knew, it would have been as important for me, but because of my knowledge, it was the only thing that will get me into masters."*

*PAR006: "So in the beginning, it was more so a thing of being a psychologist and then the pressure came in, and I was overwhelmed. I started doing my research. The only research that I ever did was like the psychometry one and like the registered."*

*PAR008: "It's like there aren't that many – I don't know if I didn't research hard enough or whatever the case may be – I just wasn't finding, you know, other avenues that I could take with my Honours degree."*

*PAR009: "I didn't know all the different options even before starting to study this year for my honours. Like what other things I can do to get myself to my end goal."*

One participant shared that she did thorough research to gain career knowledge by using different resources in order to know what she would be signing up for should she decide to go in a specific avenue.

*PAR007: "And I watched some TED talks from a clinical psychologist. Then I realised that I am not a counselling psychologist uhm so I was really focused on Clinical at that point... Uhm, and then I looked at the master's course work for UP and UCT, and I think Wits, of what modules they do for masters course work for clinical, and I looked into those topics to see if this is what I would really enjoy... I*

*googled what are like the main aspects that are important when becoming a research psychologist, and that is when I realised how your day-to-day for research would look"*

Another participant shared that due to previous experience of being in the world of work, a job role can be created even though it did not previously exist. He said:

*PAR003: "And I have seen in the real world there is literally, a job position can be created out of nothing. If you just find the right person in a company with a need. You can literally create your own job. So having that knowledge really opened my – the sense of possibility."*

#### 4.3.2.2 Career exploration

This sub-theme covers the career options and possibilities that the participants have looked at. The careers that they mentioned are displayed below.

*PAR001: "I have thought of recruitment. I considered neuropsychology for a while. I have considered marketing/learning and development."*

*PAR002: "Registered counselling... and doing psychometry."*

*PAR003: "I already sort of gravitated towards the more coaching consulting side of business... I also considered the counselling option, the registered counsellor. / I also looked at the option of going into academics with it."*

*PAR004: "What I am gonna try for first is psychometry. So definitely considering either the wellness counsellor or the PGCE to teach."*

*PAR005: "I have been looking at HR. You can go do short counselling courses, so at least you can get that's things behind your name as well. And you can still practice with it. You register with like an APCSA. You can do teaching as well, but I just don't have the patience."*

*PAR006:" ... the only thing that I considered was the ones that you mentioned basically. The main things that we know, which is registered counsellor, psychometry or teaching..."*

*PAR007: "So I applied for master's in clinical and research psychology. So my plan C was to look into psychometry."*

*PAR008: "I was considering becoming a registered counsellor. I was also considering becoming a psychometrist."*

*PAR009: "I briefly considered counselling psychology because that's also a very good option and because I also did my undergrad in industrial psychology, so that's also helped. I only applied clinical because I felt counselling is not maybe the right thing for me right now."*



#### 4.3.2.3 Self-knowledge

This sub-theme covers the perceptions the participants have about themselves in a context where their career was discussed. The following extracts present this point:

*PAR005: "I think before you apply to masters you really need to get a sense of yourself for which masters you would like to apply or if you really want to apply. I think the first step is to like to figure out do you really want to do what you want to do before you apply to anything else."*

*PAR006: "I got into honours, and to be honest with you, I was very tunnel visioned/minded ."*

*PAR007: "But I am quite stubborn when I like to set my mind to something. I was like, I wanna do psychology; no matter what you say, I am gonna do it."*

*PAR008: " My identity is centred so much around school that I just want to be done with school. I just want to get to the part where I am doing what I love and why I have gotten to this field in the first place like I also think I didn't realise how long it has taken and it will take."*

*PAR010: " And I would like to become more completely me before I go about try[ing] to help other people because I feel that it's very valuable that I trust myself. I feel that I need to know that I know myself."*

#### 4.3.2.4 Linking self-knowledge and career-knowledge

This sub-theme is focused on looking at how the participants have aligned their personalities, skills and interests to the career options that they have explored.

*PAR001: "I feel like I am able to point people in the right direction, but it provides me a level of joy./ don't think marketing aligns with my personality. I can honestly... yeah, yeah, no. I don't think so. Apart from the salary no/in terms of neuro, I would say mmmh.. assisting people to live a more comfortable life despite their impairment would make me feel well-being but. I don't know if I have the personality, but I would say the patience side of me. I would have the patience to deal with patients like that who have impairments or cognitive deficits."*

*PAR002: "I feel that I can connect well with people. I find a lot of enjoyment in actually like, uh, assessing not only myself but like the people as well, and I find it interesting."*

*PAR003: "I do have an affinity of relating to people. Uhm, coupled with a strong, strong thirst for knowledge, search for knowledge, and love of research, which I am able to do well because of the analytical side that I have. I always found it easy to just talk to people and interesting to ask them questions and sort of analyse how they think... So I am easy to relate to people. I do enjoy that public speaking component and relating to students."*

*PAR004: "I have a very strong intuition, [and] I think that plays a role in counselling./ think that value of me wanting to promote well-being in other people*

*definitely persuaded me to go the counselling route./ WellnessCounsellor: it's the closest that I can get to counselling psychology in the meantime because you are able to open up your own practice./ And I have tutored as well as part-time jobs, and I do find that I enjoy teaching and I get excited about a lot of areas in science. I do think that I am an intellectual, and it's also part of my personality type cause I am an INTJ."*

*PAR005:" I think I am just quite hardworking, and I don't mind working at all. I know corporate life is quiet because that is your typical 9 – 5 life sometimes. I am quite balanced in my ways, so I will be able to manage that. I like challenges I like working with people. I know with HR, you can work with people as well. I just want to make change. I am just interested in trauma counselling and stuff like that, so the reason for doing the short counselling course is my reason for doing a master's in counselling, but now I can only gain more experience from it because you still need to do like a certain amount of hours or you can like to complete the course."*

*PAR006:" I am very empathetic. I am not a judgemental person. I do love seeing people come together and help one another. And I feel like I am like that in a sense. Like I am eager to help you improve your life. I would be equipped to learn certain skills that I will be able to apply not just in my journey with psychometry but also in psychology. If it ever gets to the point where I would need to conduct those assessments in my profession as a clinical psychologist. "*

*PAR007:" I always had a very focused interest in the biological aspect of psychology, which is why I was so interested in clinical psychology. With clinical, I am not saying*

*you solve the problem but you find the problem and then you address it that way. I think personality wise, I am a problem-solving person. So that's what attracts me to clinical. With academic I am quite of a bookworm. I am a bit of a nerd. I love reading and researching. Like the researching obviously in an informal way. That's like one of my favourite things to do is like understanding other people's points of view."*

*PAR008:" I think the clinical field best suits that in comparison to the other fields. Because with clinical, I can do what I like, which is being with people. Working one-on-one if I want to. Working within a community, but at the same time I want delve into psychopathology and like extremities of behaviour and just figuring out and researching more around that, while working with people. It's like Clinical offered a match of my interest in one as opposed to like research."*

*PAR009:" From a young age like, I am very attuned to other people's emotions and feelings. I have a great capacity for understanding what people are going through. I believe I have an open mind. So I think that will help me as a clinical psychologist and because I went through depression. I also went through therapy. I think counselling psych because I worked with students and understand that especially more in terms of like career counselling. "*

#### *4.3.2.5 Career Decisions: The Honours experience*

This sub-theme will discuss the career decisions and career goals adjustments that the participants made as a result of factors and challenges that they experienced within their Honours year. The below excerpts displays the:

*PAR002: "wanted to pivot to kind of like anthropology, but I was then okay if I get into honours psychology, then I will just go with it because it like difficult to get in. Going into information sessions actually promoted my desire to kind of like apply for counselling psychology."*

*PAR004: "I have only had to now consider as a backup plan. In terms of now having to think of doing something because I don't want to be just sitting around and wait to get in."*

*PAR005: "So what happened was – so the whole thing with the other psychologist, it happened when I didn't get into my interview. It's like a family friend and they just like phoned me and told me that it's not like the end you the world. There's different option[s].../you start to panic about your future, then you go and google..."*

*PAR006: "I considered registered counsellor, but the whole Bpsych equivalent thing – it just sounded like it's going to be more exhausting, so in the meantime, as I try to retain my direction – although I am heading to the same path in the way I would redirect is through psychometry."*

*PAR007: "Like I said, when I got rejected from masters, I considered academic masters."*

*PAR009: "After this whole master's selection thing, I am actually just – I didn't get selected, but I am on the waiting list. I still had to consider more options for next year..."*

The above extracts clearly demonstrate that the main reasons why they've had to readjust their career goals or relook at their career decision are due to the master's rejections and the competitiveness that comes with getting accepted into masters.

#### 4.3.2.6 Career Planning and moving ahead

Some of the participants described the career plans and strategies they would take should they not get admitted into a master's programme. They share that they would do more research and get more experience. The following extracts demonstrate this finding:

*PAR003: "Yeah, definitely, what I would do is go back to my network as one option./ Do some online research about what you don't know about the use of a psychological honours degree."*

*PAR005: "The first thing is to gain a bit more experience."*

*PAR007: "My plan is to see if there are any internships in a clinical setting. And then see if I can do any job shadowing with a research psychologist. That's my strategy. My strategy is to take it one day at a time. You can volunteer at the HIV Counselling section, and they have volunteer opportunities, I believe, for research."*

*PAR010: "What next is essential throughout this next month? I wanna do research, but I am also going to do application."*

*PAR009: "Then again, it's about to keep on growing, keep on getting experience./ So my plan now is to, next year, do something for a year to gain experience."*

One of the participants mentioned that they would like to acquire a new skill, which is learning a new language. She mentioned that:

*PAR007: "I also want to do another language. I have signed up to learn Zulu."*

### **4.3.3 The Lived Experience of Honours**

This theme covers what doing and obtaining an honours degree means for the participants, personally and for their careers. Lastly, this section will report what they believe the value of an honours degree in psychology is within the South African context.

#### *4.3.3.1 Personal meaning of an honours degree*

Some participants described that an Honours degree would be a personal achievement and stepping stone and bridge to getting closer to achieving their ultimate career goal:

*PAR001: "A stepping stone to get to masters. And that it is so much more than just a stepping stone... It's developed into growing who I am, so yeah."*

*PAR005: "Firstly, I think it's because it's also as competitive as masters.....like the amount of students there were and then those who applied. And then me being one of them that they chose, like you feel quite accomplished in yourself, but then again."*

*PAR006: " Or me personally, it just meant – to be honest with you as like a black person, it's nice to get degrees and more qualifications and bring them home and be able to show that this is what I did/ here is a sense of like respect that comes with more degrees that I obtain and being educated. A degree makes you more trustworthy in black families."*

*PAR007: " Graduating with honours is both, an emotional and academic achievement."*

*PAR008: "It's like a personal achievement and something that I am quite proud of to be in the programme."*

#### *4.3.3.2 Career Importance of an honours degree*

The participants shared why they believe an Honours degree is important for their careers. Participants shared that an honours degree was important as it offered them the opportunity to gain more insight and knowledge about the field of psychology. They expressed:

*PAR004: "I have always wanted to become a psychologist; for me it was important because I need It for master's and to gain more of a theoretical background in psychology than what undergrad provided."*

*PAR007: "I would say it was important. It helped me understand the psychology field because, in undergrad, it's a very basic textbook knowledge of psychology as a theme... A lot of the modules are more application-based."*



*PAR009: "It's kind of get also to gain more exposure in terms of the psychology field and becoming more aware of like our options and stuff."*

Other participants believed that an honours degree would increase their chance of employability, their ability to provide services to people in the field of psychology and allow them to be specialists. They shared:

*PAR001: "So it means it's preparing me and my mental state uhm to provide uh to provide a suitable level of care [ZL: Mmmh] for people in the future."*

*PAR002: "I think that is why I chose psychology, and it was also like a part about the job market where I was just like, well, you know, you are almost kind of guaranteed a job."*

*PAR003: "In terms of career, I considered honours, again for the specialisation that is perceived when one has a postgraduate degree in a certain direction. You get perceived like a specialist or like someone who is serious about a topic or industry and sets you apart, and it contributes to your credibility no matter what you do."*

*PAR006: "When I made the decision to get my honours degree. It was because I want to be able to have a career... I was sure that it was going to be in psychology and that I want to be a therapist, you know but uhm, when I made a decision, it was more so I can have that sense of stability and that sense of certainty."*

Two of the participants expressed that an Honours degree is a requirement for their career goal and admission to a master's programme

*PAR005: " Just because without it you can't go do masters. "*

*PAR008: "...for my career ... I am a step closer to reaching the goal of becoming a psychologist"*

#### 4.3.3.3 Understanding the value of an Honours degree in South Africa

The participants shared what they felt the value of an Honours degree is in the South African Context. Some participants believed that an Honours degree would provide one with skills that would set one apart in the South African job market. The following excerpts reveal this finding:

*PAR003: " I think it just adds a signal to society that you are serious about the working of the mind, and your knowledgeable about it and you have gone through the specialization of a post-grad degree... It gives you skills and it shows people that you have skills. That is valueable in various fields not just employment. "*

*PAR008: " Two degrees is valuable, especially, in South Africa, you know with the job market. It's like everybody now is trying to further their education to make themselves, you know stand out a little bit. "*

*Some participants believed that an honours degree in psychology would serve to be beneficial for larger social community members:*

*PAR004: "In my personal experience I think it is essential to get a master's degree if you want to earn nicely. / I also think you can make an impact ignoring the money side of it with an honours. You can still help people and make an impact in people's lives with counselling."*

*PAR005: "for your masters degree, you need to get your honours degree, so that's why I think honours would be valuable, uhm. It's also valuable to do the small courses even though you can't do the big registered psychologist; at least you can help a few people, even in your community. Like community-based, you can still help South Africa; you have at least a bit of experience in the field of psychology."*

*Some of the participants were not aware of the value of an Honours degree in psychology in South Africa, while others believed that it holds no value unless one gets a master's degree:*

*PAR006: "I honestly didn't know what I could do with it, so the value that it holds in South Africa to me it seemed small. It seemed like even if you have an honours, you still need more."*

*PAR009: "... It's difficult because a degree doesn't mean much without experience and all those types of things. So it is difficult to say what the value of an honours degree in psychology is because you only become registered after your masters."*

*PAR010: "...unfortunately, from what I have known is that an honours degree isn't that helpful until you get into masters."*

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In the research study, a total of three main themes and 13 sub-themes emerged from this study. Some of the themes had been identified and alluded to in the literature review while new emerged. The themes and subthemes will be discussed in the following chapter and integrated into the existing literature.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the career planning, career awareness and career maturity of students studying the Honours programme in psychology from their subjective point of view. The researcher intended to explore the following research questions: What does pursuing an Honours degree in psychology mean for the students and their careers? How have their academic background and lived experiences in the psychology field informed and contributed to their career planning? The following sections will discuss the themes that were discovered and developed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the findings of the study will be integrated and compared with existing literature. The recommendations and limitations of the study will be discussed in the following chapter.

## 5.2 The Development of career awareness in Honours psychology students

According to Super's career developmental theory, in their life-span, individuals engage in 5 developmental stages, namely: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. (Long, 2012; Super, 1980). It is in these stages that an individual's career awareness, preferences and competencies will grow and develop (Long, 2012). The first two stages of Super's career theory are the most relevant for this research, with the second stage being the focal point. During the growth stage, which occurs between birth and 14 years, individuals are introduced and exposed to different occupations in their social setting, which then results in the development of careers and vocational identity (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

On the other hand, it is during the exploration stage that individuals go through a process where they try out a variety of occupational choices and options (Bakari, 2014). Often, when individuals undergo their exploration stage, they are between the ages of 15 –

24, denoting that they would predominantly be in university during this stage (Long, 2012; Hunt & Rhodes, 2021). Consequently, according to Super's theory, the participants of this study are within their exploration stage of career development as they are university students and are engaged in developmental tasks and activities relating to this stage. These activities include gathering career information, exploring career options, developing a self-concept, and narrowing down their career preferences. This study's findings show that most of the participants met the age criteria of the Super's exploration stage and demonstrated that they became engaged in career development activities related to activities from high school through to their Honours year. Thus, it is not surprising that career exploration and being proactive in gaining career-related information was an activity that took place for the Honours psychology students of this study.

According to stages of Super's career developmental theory, career awareness plays a crucial role in the growth and exploration stages (Nasir & Lin, 2013). Career awareness involves having information on career opportunities, educational & skills requirements, the job market, work expectations and industry knowledge (Ruggunan & Kanengoni, 2017). One of the ways in which students can increase their level of career awareness is by utilising resources that will provide them with relevant career information and how to put these resources to best practice (Nasir & Lin, 2013).

The participants of this study had different experiences of how they developed career awareness and how it is a continuous process as they are navigating through university. The findings of this study show that most participants had already been introduced or exposed to the field of psychology before enrolment with any institution. The key players in the development of their career awareness were their personal contacts (family, friends, etc.),

career counsellors and teachers. This finding is supported by the statement that career awareness before university is generally gained through interacting in career-related conversations with peers and teacher-learner relationships (Tian & Chen, 2018).

Moreover, the participants of the study further reported that their career awareness concerning the field of psychology was further developed within the university borders and by getting in touch with professionals and academics within the field of psychology. Subsequently, the participants utilised the career services and mentorship opportunities offered by the University of Pretoria to gain more insight and clarity. These results demonstrate the findings of several studies indicating that universities or higher education institutions offer career counselling services, career fairs, and even training for various fields of study (Acai, 2014; Brewer, 2009).

In addition to this, career services and career guidance programs play a role in helping students make informed career decisions as these platforms offer students the opportunity to explore themselves, their career of interest and career possibilities (Anwar et al., 2021). In this study, the researcher found that by engaging and utilising career guidance programs, speaking to professionals in the field and using information sessions provided by the university, the participants received a deeper understanding of the field of psychology, and this guided them to make better career decisions that are aligned with their self-concept. With this, it is evident that universities play an imperative role in helping students gain more knowledge and awareness regarding their careers. (Getachew & Daniel, 2016).

Lastly, the participants in this study reported that social media and the usage of various web pages dedicated to psychology contributed to obtaining knowledge about the



available career options. A recent study showed that there has been an increase in the use of the internet, social media and mobile applications among young people in research about careers and job opportunities available (Anwar et al., 2021; Sampson et al., 2018). It is no surprise that the participants have used social media and the internet to access career information. Most of the participants of the study were proactive in engaging with the resources to gain career information and develop their career awareness. This resulted in them reducing career-related anxieties and contributed to their career planning.

The above findings address the second research question, which this study intended to answer: how have their academic background and lived experiences in the psychology field informed and contributed to their career planning? The findings demonstrate that by engaging with different resources, the participants of the study were not only able to increase their career awareness but also use the information gathered as a vehicle for their career decision-making and career planning within the field of psychology. However, it is essential to note that career awareness is not the only factor that is key in informing an individual's career planning. There are various factors that contribute to and affect career planning. Career knowledge and self-knowledge are required for students to better prepare for their future and to navigate potential career-related challenges. Career knowledge and self-knowledge will be further unpacked in the following section.

### **5.3 Career Maturity**

According to Super, for an individual to achieve career maturity, they need to accomplish different developmental tasks (Bakari, 2014). In other words, individuals are deemed to have career maturity based on how well they can cope with developmental tasks during the different life stages. The level of affective and cognitive career development

progress an individual has made is measured through their career maturity (Bakari, 2014). Career maturity is imperative when an individual needs to make a career choice and navigate around career-related challenges.

The six dimensions that lead to career maturity are career planning, career decision-making and career exploration, information regarding the chosen occupation and realisation (this encompasses self-knowledge) (Bakari, 2014; Buys, 2014; Lestari & Tentama, 2020; Mubiana, 2010). The following section will unpack the above-mentioned dimensions of the study and the level of the participants' career maturity.

### **5.3.1 Career-knowledge, Career Exploration and Self-knowledge**

Career knowledge refers to the knowledge that one has about the career options or career alternatives that are available to them (Mubiana, 2010). This study found that some participants who had limited or no career knowledge were not aware of or did not know the different career options available to them with an Honours degree. This finding is consistent with another study that was conducted, and it was found that, among various factors, career choice decision is affected by obtaining adequate information on the career choice (Uleanya et al., 2021).

On the other hand, this study found that the participant who was invested and intentional about collecting her career information could pre-empt what she was signing herself up for. This is aligned with the study that students who engage with career guidance and information resources are more likely to make informed career decisions (Abubakar, 2018). From these two findings, students who do not engage in career guidance activities or utilise career information resources will experience challenges with making career decisions that are

aligned with their personalities (Abubakar, 2018). In this study, 40% of the participants showed that they had not researched sufficiently about what they could do with their Honours degree, which may, to an extent, affect their career planning and career decision-making.

In this study, 90% of the students explored different careers they could venture into with their Honours degree. Not only is this evidence that they are in the emerging adulthood developmental stage to develop relevant skills and training for the world of work. But it demonstrates a particular level of career maturity that they have accomplished within the exploration stage of Super's Career Developmental Theory (Grosemans et al., 2020; Super, 1980). It is evident that the participants were intentional about looking into careers based on their interests and abilities. In addition to that, the participants were able to identify their self-knowledge as to why they believed they chose to explore a particular career. This is aligned with Super's theory, which proposes that an individual will choose an occupation that is aligned with their self-concept (Super, 1980).

### **5.3.2 Career Decision making, Career Planning and moving ahead.**

Career maturity involves affective and cognitive skills, which are deemed necessary in helping individuals make realistic and well-informed career decisions. Self-knowledge and career knowledge work hand in hand in the journey of career planning. However, career planning is not as simple as it seems above. Students will need to adopt strategies and steps that will help them move in the desired direction. According to Chetana & Mohapatra (2017, p. 615), the "basic steps of career planning are Self-assessment; Investigating and researching career opportunities; Goal setting; Action Planning and Evaluation".

The participants have made career adjustments due to different causes, which include not being accepted into a master's programme and discouragement from pursuing a psychology degree. This called for them to relook at their initial career plan and consider alternate plans that would help them move in the direction of their intended career goals. Career planning is essential as it helps individuals determine the strategies step-by-step that they need to take to achieve their set career objectives. Although it is crucial to understand how the participants experienced their Honours degree, what is more important is how they will use these experiences to achieve their career goals and navigate the career-related challenges that they faced.

The researcher observed that most of the participants were aware of the challenges that come with pursuing a career in psychology, two of which are the competitive nature of the master's programme as well as the high numbers of rejections within the programme because of the limited number of students that can be enrolled into the programme. The participants of this study have demonstrated that they are aware of the competition and rejections that come with furthering one's studies in the field of psychology. Although several participants have experienced a fear of rejection, it did not derail them from considering alternative plans in the meantime that can help in upskilling them to stand out or lead to them becoming potential master's candidates. This demonstrates the career maturity of the participants.

#### **5.4 Significance of an Honours Degree**

There are various reasons and different motives why individuals pursue a postgraduate degree. In the global trends report on higher education, it was outlined that one of the reasons students further their studies by pursuing a post-graduate degree is a result of desiring a higher salary within their careers (Altbach et al., 2019). In this study, participant

PAR004 showed that she was aware that by going beyond an honour's degree, one has the potential to earn a good salary. This finding supports the findings of the report. Furthermore, several studies discovered that students who decide to pursue their postgraduate degrees have more career options available to them and can specialise within their respective fields (Ferreira & Van Antwerpen, 2016; Manathunga et al., 2012; University of Pretoria, 2019).

When discussing the value of an Honours degree with the participants of this study, they expressed that their motive behind pursuing an Honours degree is due to the prospect of becoming a specialist in the field of psychology. Similarly, this study showed that the participants were aware that with an Honours degree in psychology, the opportunity to potentially venture into various industries is available to them. This does not only support the above finding but demonstrates the value of an Honours degree in psychology. In this study, it is observed that participants were aware of the door of opportunity that opens up when going beyond an undergraduate degree. This illustrates the opening statement and research finding that there are better opportunities for those who have furthered their studies beyond undergraduate.

Among the motives behind pursuing an Honours degree, a previous study that was conducted on the students at the University of Western Cape found that 57.8% of the students pursued a postgraduate degree due to their desire to expand their body of knowledge in their respective fields (Hoffman & Julie, 2012). Under the Career Importance of an Honours degree sub-theme of this study, 3 participants shared that an Honours degree is an instrument for gaining and further developing their theoretical knowledge in the field of psychology. Additionally, the content covered during their Honours year offered them the opportunity to apply their learnings beyond the classroom and into the real world. Thus, an Honours degree

enhances and imparts skills which are beneficial to individuals both professionally and personally.

Youth unemployment is on the rise, and it is imperative that students invest in themselves to place themselves in a favourable position for employability. Over the years, researchers have argued that obtaining a university degree is the key to securing better employment opportunities and pursuing post-graduate studies (Eunice et al., 2018; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016; Mutambara et al., 2018; RajECKI & Borden, 2011). In the findings discussed under the Understanding the Value of an Honours Degree in South Africa sub-theme of the study, we see that the participants believed that an Honours degree is valuable in the sense that it presents one with skills that are required for employability.

Ferreira & Van Antwerpen (2016) found that individuals will pursue an honours degree for various reasons, including eligibility for a master's programme, to increase their career options and to conduct future research within their field. In this study, the participants have been clear in stating what pursuing an Honours degree means for them; they disclosed that an Honours degree would be a stepping stone to their master's and that the programme was a way to become more knowledgeable within the field of psychology.

On the personal side, the participants expressed that obtaining an Honours degree for them would be a personal accomplishment from an emotional and academic perspective. This finding demonstrates that in attaining a degree, individuals experience a level of satisfaction and a higher level of self-esteem in pursuing a postgraduate degree (Incikabi et al., 2013; Rurst & Carson, 2021). The findings of the current study show that motivation to pursue an Honours degree in psychology is also intrinsic.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This section has provided insight into answering the following research question of this study: what does pursuing an Honours degree in psychology mean for the students and their careers? From the findings and themes developed in the study, for Honours psychology students, obtaining this degree means the following for their careers: access to different career options, access to various industries, specialisation, and credibility in the field of psychology, an opportunity to earn a higher salary and personal interests and accomplishments. This shows that both meanings ascertained by the participants of this study are related and motivated by external and internal factors in the participants' lives.

Although the study found similarities in the experiences of the participants, it is essential to remember that, simultaneously, each individual experience of career maturity, career awareness, and career planning is unique to them. In addition, these findings justify Super's Career Developmental Theory that within the exploration stage, individuals will begin to identify and narrow the career options available according to their vocational identity and then will seek education and training based on the choices they made.

With this study, the participants identified and shared how they were initially introduced to the field of psychology and how they narrowed their career choices, which resulted in them furthering their studies within the field. Moreover, most of the participants demonstrated career maturity as they were able to display their readiness to make appropriate choices when engaged in planned career exploration while possessing relevant career knowledge, self-knowledge, and decision-making knowledge.

# **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



## 6.1 Introduction

The following chapter will look at the limitations of the research study and make recommendations for future studies. Lastly, we will conclude the study and provide a summary of the valuable outcomes.

## 6.2 Limitations

Although the researcher interviewed 11 participants, only the interviews of the first 10 participants were reported and analysed, as this was in alignment with the proposed sample size of the study. Keeping the sample size small in this study was important as phenomenological research studies are concerned with the quality of the data and not a large sample size. In addition, keeping the sample size at 10 participants allows for data saturation. In a phenomenological study, the subjective experience of the participants is vital. However, this may result in biases from the participants as they may not accurately express or recall their experiences. In addition, the small sample sizes and focus on subjective experiences in this study do not allow for the study to be generalised to the population.

Conducting phenomenological research can be time-consuming as the data collection and data analysis process requires the researcher to spend a significant amount of time transcribing, coding and analysing. The interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom, and some participants opted not to turn on their cameras. This made it difficult to observe their body language throughout the interview. Therefore, the researcher may have interpreted the data in a different fashion. In addition, the researcher assumed her positionality as a previous psychology Honours student and was reflexive. This may have contributed to the potential bias when asking the participants follow-up questions during the interviews and interpretation of the data.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Future research studies should consider including students doing an Honours degree in psychology from other institutions in South Africa, as this study focused on students studying at the University of Pretoria. Secondly, to broaden this research study, future researchers can do a follow-up study with the participants to track whether they have decided to pursue a career related to the field of psychology. Thirdly, future studies can conduct the interviews in person. This will allow the interviewer to observe the non-verbal cue of the participants, which is essential as it communicates their attitudes and edify their responses to the interview questions. Fourthly, to expand the research study, future studies can look into whether the participants have set career plans, i.e. Plan A and Plan B.

## **6.3 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the career planning, career awareness and career maturity of students studying the Honours programme in psychology from their subjective point of view. This study found that the participants had a set of career objectives that they wanted to achieve, and for most, an Honours degree was a vehicle to reach their ultimate career goal. In addition, the participants showed that by studying for an Honours degree in psychology, they were able to gain enough experience and skills to plan the strategies to accomplish their career goals. This study found that for participants, an Honours degree means accessibility to different career options, potential to get exposure to various industries, and specialisation. It provides one with credibility in the field of psychology, the opportunity to earn a higher salary and personal and academic accomplishment.

From this study, the researcher found that although some of the participants had initially been exposed to the field of psychology in various forms, many of them gained

career-related information, skills and training while they were in university. This finding highlights universities' essential role in training individuals for the labour market. The themes that emerged from this study suggest that deciding on a career choice is not a fixed process; however, it requires effort and obtaining the relevant information so that one can make well-informed decisions that are aligned with one's self-concept. Careers constantly develop and require constant evaluation to ensure that the individual moves in the desired direction. Although the study found similarities in the participants' experiences, it is essential to remember that, simultaneously, each individual experience of career maturity, career awareness, and career planning is unique to them.

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**APPENDIX A: SCREENING SURVEY**

Please tick (X) your correct answer

Question	Yes	No
Are you currently enrolled for a Bachelor of Social Sciences Honours (Psychology) programme?		
Are you currently studying at the University of Pretoria?		
Do you currently have access to the Zoom application platform?		
Have you previously done any research on career opportunities in the field of psychology?		





## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Part A: Career Maturity**

1. What does obtaining an Honours degree in psychology mean to you and for your career?
2. Have you considered other areas in the field of psychology?
3. Which of your personality traits do you believe, and think are aligned with your above-mentioned areas in the field of psychology? Elaborate.

### **Part B: Career Awareness**

1. What resources are you aware of and have utilised in researching and collecting information about the field of psychology?
2. How did you develop this awareness?
3. What are the career options that you have explored in the field of psychology?
4. What are your thoughts on how your Honours degree can be utilized in the South African context?

### **Part C: Career planning**

1. What are the strategies that could be useful in your career planning once you have completed your Honours degree?
2. What exposure have you had in the field of psychology and how has this helped with the preparation and planning of your career goals?



## **APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Career maturity awareness and planning of Honours psychology students: A phenomenological approach

Hello, my name is Zanele Lecage I am currently a Master's student at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. You are being invited to take part in my research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is essential that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully, which will explain the details of this research project. Please feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The purpose of this study is to identify and explore the career maturity and career awareness experiences of Honours psychology students is and how their experiences have contributed and informed their career planning within the field of psychology. In addition, the researcher of this study would like to explore whether Honours students have explored other career options within the field of psychology besides becoming a psychologist.

### **WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

- You will be invited to participate because you are an Honours student currently enrolled for a Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) in Psychology.
- You are currently enrolled at the University of Pretoria
- You currently have access to the Zoom application platform
- You have previously researched the career opportunities within the field of psychology

### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

- You will be expected to participate in a semi-structured interview. This interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time.
- The interview will be conducted via Zoom.
- You will be expected to answer the questions and you are more than welcome to expand on the questions and elaborate further.
- Once all the questions have been answered, there will be a time at the end to discuss any further concerns or questions you may have.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

- Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, if you decide not to take part in the study without negative consequences or being penalized.

**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

- Findings from this data will be disseminated through conferences and publications. Reporting of findings will be anonymous, and only your demographic information (age and gender) will be reported. Any other personal information will be kept confidential to the researcher.
- Please note participant information will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher is legally obliged to report incidents such as abuse and suicide risk.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

- Direct benefits for you as a participant, you will be able to identify your level of awareness about your career and identify what areas you need to work on to achieve your career goals

**WHAT ARE THE ANTICIPATED RISKS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?.**

- The risks in this study are harm that may arise from the discomfort of speaking about career plans or anxiety regarding career goals. This may result in increased levels of anxiety. To minimize the risk, you may contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group's mental health line at 0800 747 747.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT SOME FORM OF DISCOMFORT OCCUR AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

- A day after your interview you will receive a debriefing email with the career services contact details from the University of Pretoria in the case that you will need career guidance

### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

- The raw data that has been collected and recorded on Zoom will be loaded on to the University of Pretoria's google drive cloud storage for security. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the files on google drive. In addition, the Microsoft Word documents where notes were transcribed will be loaded to the drive for storage.
- Once the research and dissertation has been completed the final processed data will be loaded onto the UP-Research data repository for a period of 10 years future use by other researchers or investigators subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

### **WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH DATA BE USED FOR?**

- Data gathered from the participant would be used for research purposes that included.
- Dissertation, article publication, national and international conference presentations for future use subject to the Research Ethics Review and approval.

### **WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

- No, you will not be paid to take part in this study. The data gathering will take part virtually due to COVID-19 Regulations and restrictions.

### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL**

- This study has not yet received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria.

## **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

- The findings of the research study will be shared with you by email, once the dissertation has been marked and completed.

## **WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS OR ANYTHING I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE STUDY?**

If you have questions about this study or you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided below. If you have questions regarding the rights as a research participant, or if problems arise that you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the supervisor, and contact details are below

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and in advance for participating in this study.

### **Researcher**

Zanele Lecage

076 013 1272

[u21594083@tuks.co.za](mailto:u21594083@tuks.co.za) / [zanelelecache@gmail.com](mailto:zanelelecache@gmail.com)

## **Supervisor**

Kamilla Rawatlal

+27 (0)12 420 3430

[kamilla.rawatlal@up.ac.za](mailto:kamilla.rawatlal@up.ac.za)



**APPENDIX D: WRITTEN CONSENT FORM**

Career maturity, awareness and planning of Honours psychology students: A phenomenological approach

{ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER} (If available)

**WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any consequences or penalties.			



STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I permit the researchers of this study to access the information.			
I understand that this study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria.			
I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear understanding that, I will not be linked to the information in any way.			
I give consent that data gathered may be used for dissertation, article publication, conference presentations and writing policy briefs.			
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.			
I consent to be audio recorded via Zoom			
I consent to be video recorded via Zoom			
I consent to have my audio recordings /videos/photos be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.			

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I permit to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.			
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in the above study.			

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature



Office of the Registrar

2022-08-04

Ms Z Lecage  
Department of Psychology  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Pretoria

Email: [zanelelecache@gmail.com](mailto:zanelelecache@gmail.com)

Dear Ms Lecage

#### **APPROVAL OF RESEARCH STUDY**

The UP Survey Coordinating Committee has granted approval for the research study titled "Career maturity, awareness, and planning of Honours psychology students: A phenomenological approach".

The proposed research study has to strictly adhere to the associated study protocol, as well as the UP Survey Policy and the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities instructions.

Please liaise with the Market Research Office in the Department of Institutional Planning ([carlien.nell@up.ac.za](mailto:carlien.nell@up.ac.za)) to officially register the study and to finalise the survey regulations, procedures and the fieldwork dates. In order to register the study, the Market Research Office has to receive the formal ethical approval letter from the Faculty of Humanities.

A final electronic copy of the research outcomes must be submitted to the Survey Coordinating Committee as soon as possible after the completion of the study.

Kind regards



**Prof CMA Nicholson**  
**REGISTRAR**  
**CHAIRPERSON: SURVEY COORDINATING COMMITTEE**